

Message Text

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17

ACTION EA-09

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INFO USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC

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C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 1818

NOT RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PINT PGOV CH

SUBJECT: FEI I-MIN COMMENTS ON PRC DOMESTIC POLITICAL SCENE

1. SUMMARY: TA KUNG PAO EDITOR FEI I-MIN REPEATEDLY EMPHAISZED TO CONGENOFF FEBRUARY 18 THAT CURRENT POLITICAL STRUGGLE IN CHINA WILL NOT AFFECT PRC FOREIGN POLICIES OR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANS. FIE DESCRIBED TIMING AND BACKGROUND OF HUA KUO-FENG APPOINTMENT AS ACTING PREMIER AND OPINED HW WOULD EVENTUALLY BECOME PREMIER WHEN CONFIRMED BY THIRD PLENUM AND NPC. HE ALSO STATED CHEN HSI-LIEN IS ACTING DEFENSE MINISTER, NOTING HIS PAST AFFILIATION WITH TENG HSIAO-PING. END SUMMARY.

2. IN A FEBRUARY 18 CONVERSATION WITH CONGENOFF TA KUNG PAO EDITOR FEI I-MIN REPEATEDLY STRESSED THAT WHATEVER
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IDEOLOGICAL TURMOIL MAY BE GENERATED BY THE CURRENT ATTACKS ON

"CAPITALIST ROADERS WITHIN THE PARTY" CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY AND LONG-RANGE DEVELOPMENT GOALS WILL REMAIN CNSTANT. AS AN EXAMPLE, FEI NOTED THE ALMOST SIMULTANEROUS ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE APPOITMENT OF HUO KUO-FENG AS ACTING PREMIER AND THE INVITATION TO FORMER PRESIDENT NIXON TO VISIT CHINA DURING FEBRUARY. HE STRESSED THAT IW WAS THE SAME POLITBURO THAT MADE BOTH OF THESE DECISIONS. IN RESPONSE TO CONGENOFF'S COMMENT THAT THE LANGUAGE OF RECENT MEDIA ATTACKS ON INDIVIDUALS WITHIN THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE WERE HIGHLY REMINISCENT OF THE EARLY DAYS OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, FEI VIGOROUSLY DENIED THAT THE PRC IS HEADING FOR A SIMILAR PERIOD OF DISRUPTION. HE NOTED THAT HE WAS IN PEKING IN 1966 DURING THE EARLY STAGES OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND OPINED THAT IF THE SITUATION TODAY WERE THE SAME AS THEN, THE NIXON INVITATION COULD NEVER HAVE BEEN EXTENDED.

3. FEI STATED THAT THE "CHINESE PEOPLE" WERE INFORMED OF THE HUA APPOINTMENT OF THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, IN A CENTRAL COMMITTEE DIRECTIVE, AND THAT THE STORY NO DOUBT WAS LEAKED IN HONG KONG BY ONE OF THE MANY CHINESE-NEW YEAR TRAVELERS CROSSING THE BOARDER AT THAT TIME. SPEAKING SLOWLY AS THOUGH HE WERE ALMOST RECITING THE TEXT OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT, FEI DESCRIBED THE CENTRAL DIRECTIVE AS STATING THAT CHAIRMAN MAO HAS NOMINATED HUA KUO-FENG TO BE ACTING PREMIER AND THAT THE POLITIBURO HAD UNANIMOULSY AGREED. FEI STRESSED THAT THE APPOINTMENT WAS "TEMPORARY" BECAUSE IT WOULD BE NECESSARY FOR MEETINGS OF THE THIRD PLENUM OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND THE SECOND SESSION OF THE NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS TO MEET IN ORDER TO RATIFY A PERMANENT PREMIER. HE PREDICTED THAT THERE MAY BE TWO OR THREE MONTHS OF UNCERTAINTY, BUT CLAIMED THAT THINGS WOULD THEN BECOME CLEAR.

4. CONGENOFF NOTED THAT, IN VIEW OF RECENT ATTACKS ON TENG HSIAO-PING, IT SEEMD LIKELY THAT HUA WOULD EVENTUALLY BECOME PREMIER, AND FEI READILY AGREED. COMMENTING THAT HUA'S AGE HAD BEEN DESCRIBED TO HIM VARIOUSLY AS 54 AND 58"BUT CERTAINLY UNDER 60," FEI STRESSED HUA'S VARIED EXPERIENCE OF THE CHAIRMAN" AS FACTORS IN HIS SELECTION.

5. THROUGHOUT THE CONVERSATION FEI EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE
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OF IDEOLIGICAL STRUGGLE AND DEBATE IN PREVENTING REVISIONISM AS THE MAJOR FACTOR IN THE CURRENT POLITICAL INFIGHTING. HE DESCRIBED TENG HSIAO-PING AS A MAN OVERBURDENED WITH PARTY, MILITARY AND STATE COUNCIL AFFAIRS, WHO PERHAPS HAD ALLOWED THE DAY-TO-DAY PRESSURES ON HIM TO CAUSE HIM TO NEGLECT THE IMPORTANCE OF THEORETICAL STUDY. REFERRING TO THE EDUCATIONAL DEBATE, HE DESCRIBED IN STANDARD TERMS THE EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE POSTER CAMPAIGN AGAINST EDUCATION MINISTER CHOU

JUNG-HSIN, WHOME HE DESCRIBED AS A TENG HSIAO-PING MAN. CHOU MUST MAKE A SELF-CRITICISM, HE SAID, AND TENG HSIAO-PING MUST BEAR SOME RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIM. ALTHOUGH FEI ACKNOWLEDGED TENG HSIAO-PING'S DIFFICULTIES, HE SUCCESSFULLY AVOIDED MAKING ANY PREDICTIONS AS TO HIS FUTURE.

6. IN RESPONSE TO A DIRECT QUESTION, FEI STATED FLATLY THAT CHEN HSI-LIEN IS ACTING DEFENSE MINISTER REPLACING AN AILING YEH CHIEN-YING. COMMENTING THAT THIS ANNOUNCEMENT WAS "THE OTHER HALF OF THE CENTRAL DIRECTIVE," FEI POINTED OUT THAT TELEVISION COVERAGE OF YEH AT THE HOSPITAL PAYING FINAL RESPECTS TO CHOU'S BODY SHOWED YEH SUPPORTED ON BOTH SIDES BY ATTENDANTS. RATHER SURPRISINGLY FEI ADDED THAT CHEN'S APPOINTMENT AS ACTING DEFENSE MINISTER WAS A FURTHER SIGN THAT THERE WILL BE NO MAJOR DISRUPTIONS AND NOTED THAT CHEN HSI-LIEN IS AN OLD SECOND ARMY MAN ASSOCIATED WITH TENG HSIOA-PING.

7. COMMENT: FEI'S REPEATED ASSURANCES THAT THE CURRENT POLITICAL STRUGGLE IN CHINA IS LIMITED TO THE IDEOLOGICAL REALM AND WILL NOT AFFECT FOREIGN POLICY OR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS PRECISELY WHAT ONE WOULD EXPECT FROM A PRC FRONT MAN AT THIS STAGE. HE GLOSSED OVER OR IGNORED THE GROWING STRIDENCY OF ATTACKS ON TENG HSIAO-PING AND CAPITALIST ROADERS WITHIN THE PARTY WHILE CONCENTRATING ON THE ESSENTIAL UNITY WITHIN THE POLITBURO. NEVERTHELESS, FEI WHO FOR MANY YEARS HA FUPERSONNALLY BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH CHOU EN-LAI AND AN ESSENTIALLY MODERATE POSITION, DID MANAGE TO CONVEY THE RELAXED APPEARANCE OF A MAN WHO REMAINS CONFIDENT THAT THE PRESENT CAMPAIGN IS BEING CONTROLLED BY THE PARTY AND WILL NOT GET OUT OF HAND.

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